United Nations S/PV.6061 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6061st meeting

Wednesday, 7 January 2009, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Lacroix	(France)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Ebner
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Gouider
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Yakovenko
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

09-20163 (E)

The meeting was resumed at 11.10 a.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the representatives of Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take part in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took seats at the side of the Chamber.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 7 January 2009 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Israeli military aggression into Gaza is entering its thirteenth day today. Over the course of just less than two weeks, more than 600 lives have been lost and more than 2,700 people injured, the largest majority being Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

Only yesterday, an Israeli attack killed at least 43 people and wounded about 100, who were taking refuge inside a United Nations school. There is no need to even mention the level and degree of destruction to mosques, schools, homes and infrastructure that that illegal Israeli action has brought upon the Palestinians in Gaza, because any sensible person can imagine what kind of destruction 13 days of Israeli bombardment could bring about. Any right-minded sensible person and Government would also deplore that Israeli action. There is no justification for that disproportionate, indiscriminate and excessive use of force in Gaza, not even in the name of self-defence. The Israeli action is against the rule of law and modern standards of human decency. Its actions clearly demonstrate Israel's complete disregard for international law and its violation of the United Nations Charter. Malaysia considers that act as a war crime and a crime against humanity.

How could the death of innocent civilians, particularly women and children, be in the name of self-defence? How could any other Member States of this United Nations accept that argument and condone that action? How could the Security Council, which is entrusted with the maintenance of peace and security, not react to a clear violation of international peace and security? How many more deaths and casualties and how much more destruction will it take before the Security Council is resuscitated from its paralysis in dealing with the Palestinian issue?

Is it that, after almost two weeks into the illegal Israeli aggression towards the people of Gaza, the Security Council is now struggling to stop those atrocities? We do not believe so, at least not judging by how fast it reacted in other situations. On many occasions we have expressed our deep regret over this matter, and we once again record our deepest regret at this apparent inaction by the Security Council.

However, despite that, we remain confident that this Security Council, which is mandated to ensure international peace and security, will take the necessary and appropriate action in dealing with the Israeli aggression. In fact, the Council has no option but to do just that — to stop the killing of innocent civilians and women and children and the destruction of homes,

schools, mosques and other infrastructure. A durable and sustainable cessation of hostility, including a ceasefire, must be the immediate target, with the deployment of an international monitoring or peacekeeping force to de-escalate and stabilize the situation. Israeli forces must leave the Gaza Strip. Unless it does so immediately, there will be no let-up in the death toll. One dead is far too many and the blood of those who have perished and been injured by that illegal Israeli action will also be on the hands of the Security Council.

Malaysia urges all parties to exercise the utmost restraint, in particular to avoid additional casualties among innocent civilians and damage to civilian property and infrastructure, and to refrain from acts that could further exacerbate the situation.

We also urge this Council to ensure the immediate lifting of the blockade on Gaza. The destruction resulting from Israeli aggression has further aggravated the humanitarian crisis of the beleaguered people of Gaza, who urgently need food, fuel and medicine. Israel, the occupying Power, must be made to allow international assistance to reach the people of Gaza. Despite repeated Israeli denials, what the people of Gaza have faced prior to the recent Israeli assault is nothing less than a man-made humanitarian crisis caused by the Israeli siege of Gaza, which is a point of significant importance, as it shows that the people of Gaza are not suffering from a lack of resources.

The root cause of the current violence in the Middle East is the occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. It began in 1947, when people living on the periphery of the war in Europe found themselves displaced and dispossessed to make way for another group of people torn by that conflict, and went on to the 1967 Israeli military aggression and continued expansion of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.

Since that time, a new theatre of conflict has emerged in the Middle East, which has impacted the state of peace and security globally. Since then, too, the Security Council, in its wisdom, has adopted several resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and, most recently, 1850 (2008), aimed at addressing that occupation, which is the longest known in modern history. But the occupation persists and, even worse, despite efforts towards a durable and lasting peace, including the Quartet Road Map and the Arab initiative, a comprehensive solution continues to elude us, not for lack of effort but through the sheer intransigent practices and policies of the Israeli regime.

As recently as a year ago, in clear contravention of its obligations under the Annapolis understanding, the machinery of the Israeli occupation regime plodded on relentlessly. The separation wall continued to be constructed. The illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories mushroomed. The network of checkpoints and roadblocks continued to inextricably hinder the movement and economic activities of Palestinians.

How could one expect or even hope for a tangible outcome from the peace process when one party, the oppressed, is being asked continuously to make concessions for peace when its homes are being demolished, its lands and farms confiscated, its families and communities separated and its children uprooted schools and even killed in schools? The harsh facts of life, especially for the children living under the occupation, will bear negatively not only on them when they enter adulthood but also on the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Indeed, the present situation is not conducive to durable and lasting peace. The continuing loss of life, the infliction of serious injury and the devastation of property will only deepen hatred and divisions and will not do any good to either party. Only negotiations leading to a two-State solution will bring about a durable and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians and for the entire Middle East.

The path to peace is clear. Right now, we must stop the violence and the killing. The Security Council must act now. The Council must make every effort to ensure that this Israeli military aggression cease immediately. We reiterate that the Council must exert every effort for an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of an international force so as to de-escalate the conflict and stabilize the situation, and establish other confidence-building measures between the parties with the objective of resuming the peace process. While ensuring the implementation of the ceasefire, the Security Council must also ensure the complete observance of the Council's previous resolutions, including among others resolution 242 (1967) which clearly specifies that Israeli forces must withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories.

At the same time, we also call on the leaders of Hamas and Fatah and implore them to initiate talks

immediately to resolve their differences. Reconciliation should be a priority if these leaders are genuinely committed to pursuing the objective of creating a sovereign and independent State of Palestine. Unity among the Palestinians themselves is the most critical element in attaining a solution to the predicament faced by all Palestinians.

Last year, we failed to make 2008 the year of a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine as envisioned in the Annapolis understanding. Let us concentrate our efforts again on achieving the goal we set last year — the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security, with the creation of a sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. For now, let us stop the bloodshed in Gaza before the situation spirals further, leaving no chance and hope for peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Moreno (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of participating in this debate on behalf of the 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Movement has followed the events in Gaza with the utmost concern. On 29 December, the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement, which I have the honour of chairing, issued a statement in response to the military aggression launched by Israel in the Gaza Strip. Subsequently, on Monday 5 January, only 48 hours ago, the Coordinating Bureau issued a new statement on the escalation of military activities. The Movement's position with regard to the situation in Gaza has been made duly clear to you, Sir, in your capacity as President of the Security Council, as well as to the President of the General Assembly and to the Secretary-General.

The Non-Aligned Movement vigorously condemns the escalation of the military aggression being carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Gaza Strip. The Movement is gravely concerned by and condemns in particular the Israeli ground invasion into Gaza, in flagrant defiance of the calls of the international community for a cessation of military activities and of the regional and international diplomatic efforts under way to resolve the current crisis.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its deep regret at the loss of innocent life as a result of the Israeli military attacks against the Strip, including the killing of hundreds of Palestinian civilians, among them many children, the injuring of several thousand persons, and the massive destruction of property and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip.

The Movement reiterates that this unacceptable Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza constitutes a grave violation of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and that it is intensifying the cycle of violence and threatening international peace and security, as well as the fragile peace process between the two sides.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls for the immediate cessation of all military activities and violence and for the implementation of an immediate general ceasefire. Israel should immediately end all its military attacks and strictly abide by all of its obligations as the occupying Power under international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. In this regard, the Movement urges Israel to unconditionally comply with its obligations under international law, including the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.

In view of the indiscriminate bombings affecting the civilian population, including women and children, as well as the severe humanitarian crisis prevailing in Gaza, the Non-Aligned Movement also calls for the immediate provision of protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

The Movement expresses increasingly grave concern with regard to the humanitarian crisis being faced by the Palestinian population in Gaza as a result of the ongoing military actions, the continued closure of all border crossings and the obstruction of access to humanitarian aid, including food and medicines, and the reduction of fuel and electricity supplies to the Gaza Strip by Israel. In this context, the Non-Aligned Movement calls upon Israel to end the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and to allow for the immediate and sustained opening of the border crossings into the Gaza Strip in order to ensure the free access of humanitarian aid and other essential supplies and goods, as well as to facilitate the passage of persons to and from the Gaza Strip.

In light of the gravity of this crisis, the Non-Aligned Movement expresses its profound disappointment at the inability of the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities to maintain international peace and security. Despite more than a week of sustained military attacks that have gravely affected the civilian population and heightened instability and tensions in the region, the Council has regrettably been unable to take any concrete measures to end the aggression. Once again, the Movement requests the Security Council to act urgently to address this grave situation.

NAM stresses that the international community must intensify and coordinate its efforts to put an end to this crisis and must take the required actions to support and promote the peace process and ensure compliance with international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. That is the key to a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, and is the only way to guarantee a lasting peace in the region.

The Movement is convinced that there can be no military solution to the conflict. In that context, NAM reaffirms its commitment to a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Brazil is deeply concerned at the magnitude and gravity of developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent days. Through press releases issued since the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza, Brazil has made its views widely known. We condemn the violence on all sides and deplore Israel's disproportionate military response to unlawful rocket attacks against its territory, which also must cease. The new cycle of violence is inflicting extraordinary pain and anguish on civilians. We call for an immediate ceasefire and for the opening of border crossings to the Gaza Strip to allow for the access of humanitarian aid and to alleviate the unsustainable humanitarian situation there.

The ceasefire is ever more needed in the light of the spiralling death toll and the desperate plight of the residents of Gaza, where impartial and respected observers, including the United Nations, agree that a humanitarian catastrophe is in the horizon. The loss of innocent lives in Israel is also saddening and must be stopped.

Furthermore, we add our voice to those of Security Council members in their call for a negotiated solution. Lasting peace can be achieved only through the creation of an independent Palestinian State living peacefully side by side with Israel within internationally recognized borders and in full compliance with Security Council resolutions.

Today, international public opinion expects effective action from the United Nations and its Member States. In such an endeavour, the Security Council has a key — although not an exclusive — role to play. We all share a collective interest in a respected and active Council. Its legitimacy and effectiveness would be diminished if it were to be perceived as hesitant to fulfil its legal and political obligation to maintain and restore international peace and security.

Recently, President Lula has reaffirmed our willingness to cooperate more intensely with the international community in order to defuse the current crisis and truly advance the cause of peace. That would be the main purpose of the expanded conference recently proposed by President Lula himself. Such an initiative could facilitate the work of the Council.

Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs Celso Amorim will soon visit the region. He will discuss possible ways to effectively address the current crisis and to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace. We are encouraged by the initiative of Presidents Mubarak and Sarkozy, announced yesterday. We also welcome the visit by the Secretary-General to the region. A special session of the Human Rights Council, presently under consideration, might also strengthen our collective endeavours. In addition, improving humanitarian assistance is imperative. At the request of the Palestinian Authority, Brazil is sending 14 tons of food and medicine to Gaza.

Such efforts, however do not exempt this organ from carrying out its most urgently needed action, which is to demand that all parties halt the violence immediately. A ceasefire called for by the Security Council must be fully implemented by all parties. After so many decades, no one can have the slightest illusion that there is a military solution to the conflict or that lasting political gains can be achieved through the use of force. Nor can violence be allowed to serve as a

political tool. An international mechanism to monitor a sustained cessation of hostilities could be put in place. Brazil would be willing to contribute to such a mechanism if the parties found it useful.

Just as important, the Council must ensure that all parties fully satisfy the humanitarian and economic needs of the Gaza Strip. All sides — including, given its relative strength, the State of Israel in particular — must, in each and every case and at all times, fully abide by international humanitarian law and respect human rights.

We welcome yesterday's announcement that Israel will soon open humanitarian corridors in Gaza. That is a first step that must be immediately complemented by other measures. Meanwhile, we reiterate that targeting civilian populations — through rocket firings; military action likely to cause harm to innocent civilians, especially women and children; or any other means — is unacceptable. The deaths of civilians caused by Israeli military action in the vicinity of United Nations schools in Gaza in recent days are a tragic illustration of the intolerable perils of the current situation.

Halting violence is also key to allowing the peace process to be resumed in earnest and as promptly as possible. Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority and the needed internal reconciliation among Palestinians cannot make progress while Gaza burns and its residents, as well as those of southern Israel, fear for their lives. Likewise, the negotiating process does not stand a true chance if all parties are not clearly and forcefully reminded that the international community considers a just and comprehensive settlement to be the only realistic and acceptable way forward. Only the Security Council can credibly convey that message.

Once calm is restored, the Council must assist the peace process more decisively, without prejudice to the valuable role of individual Member States, groups of Member States or other organizations. At each juncture, the Council must determine the most appropriate way to best contribute to a peaceful solution to the conflict. Now is the time to act, including through the implementation of resolution 1850 (2008), by which this organ commits the international community to a number of goals. Among them are the irreversibility of negotiations; the fulfilment of obligations under the Quartet Road Map, as stated in the Annapolis Joint Understanding; refraining from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations; and the intensification of efforts aimed at the mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence of all States in the region. All those objectives have been thwarted by recent events and their tragic repercussions. As several delegations stated in the meeting held on 16 December (see S/PV.6045), resolution 1850 (2008) put the Council to a difficult test. It must succeed.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Palouš (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate country Croatia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is deeply concerned over the ongoing fighting, the plight of civilians in and around Gaza and the suffering and anguish of the entire civilian population in the region. We deplore the ongoing hostilities, which have caused high numbers of civilian casualties, and we wish to express our sincere condolences to the families of the Palestinian and Israeli victims. We are profoundly disturbed by the losses of civilian lives at the United Nations school in Jabaliya as a result of Israeli military action.

The European Union is determined to make every effort to help stop the current violence and repeats its call for an immediate cessation of military action on both sides. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action.

The European Union urges the parties to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. The European Union recalls that no military solution can prevail in Gaza and calls for the establishment of a lasting truce. The European Union welcomes the initiative of Presidents Mubarak and Sarkozy and follows with hope the latest developments in that direction.

The European Union also calls on the parties, in particular Israel, to grant immediate, unhindered and secure passage for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. The European Union welcomes the three-hour halt of Israeli military operations and calls on Israel to open a humanitarian corridor in Gaza to allow humanitarian organizations free access to the territory. The European Union is also ready to step up its already substantial assistance for the improvement of the humanitarian situation of those in need.

The European Union fully supports the international efforts to find an immediate solution to the current crisis and takes an active part in these efforts. The foreign ministers of the States members of the European Union met in Paris on 30 December 2008 and put forward their proposals to resolve the crisis. Subsequently, a European ministerial delegation led by the European Union presidency, represented by Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, travelled to the region to seek an end to the violence, to alleviate the current distressing humanitarian situation and to discuss the European Union proposals agreed upon in Paris.

First, the current situation on the ground makes the need to reach an immediate and permanent ceasefire absolutely urgent. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action. The cessation of fighting should allow a lasting and normal opening of all border crossings, as provided for in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The European Union is ready to re-dispatch the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Rafah to enable its reopening in cooperation with Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It is also willing to examine the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points, provided that the issues relating to security have found a satisfactory response.

Secondly, immediate humanitarian action is required. Food, urgent medical supplies and fuel must be delivered to the Gaza Strip, the safe evacuation of the injured must be allowed and immediate access for humanitarian workers should be made possible through the opening of crossing points. The European Union dispatched a field mission to provide the most appropriate response as quickly as possible, in cooperation with the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and non-governmental organizations.

Lastly, the European Union reiterates the need to step up the peace process. In this context, it welcomed the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008). We are convinced that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in Gaza or elsewhere. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on the process set out in Annapolis and in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, in particular land for peace, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Quartet's Road Map. It must lead towards the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza existing side by side with Israel in peace and security.

In order to foster a lasting settlement, the European Union, while neither intervening in the negotiations nor prejudging their outcome, reiterates its willingness to assist in the implementation of a final peace agreement when the time comes. The European Union calls upon the parties to desist from any actions that threaten the viability of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, in conformity with international law.

The European Union is fully aware of the responsibility of the international community, especially the Quartet. The European Union also reiterates the importance of the Arab partners' sustained, broad and constructive commitment. In this respect, it considers that the Arab Peace Initiative offers a solid and appropriate basis for peace in the Middle East to which all parties should give their consideration.

The European Union also encourages inter-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, commends the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in this respect, and is prepared to support any Government which respects the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments, resolutely supports the peace negotiations with Israel and pursues policies and measures that reflect the Quartet's principles.

Finally, let me stress once again that the European Union is determined to assist alongside the other members of the Quartet and the region's States in ending violence and re-launching the peace process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express our gratitude for this opportunity for States non-members of the Security Council to express their views on the very serious situation in the Gaza Strip.

The recent developments in the Gaza Strip are alarming and once again show that the main victims of violence and military operations are innocent civilians, especially Palestinians. On the occasion of the beginning of the Israeli military operations in Gaza on 3 January, the Argentine Government condemned such operations and the disproportionate use of force by Israel, as well as the continuous rocket attacks by Palestinian groups against Israeli territory.

In spite of the reiterated calls on behalf of most of the international community, hostilities have intensified over the past few days, and yesterday saw the death of more than 40 civilians as a result of Israeli attacks against a school operated by the United Nations in the Gaza Strip. My country most vigorously condemns these attacks and believes that an independent international investigation should be established to determine responsibilities and to prevent such acts from being repeated. I would like to convey to the families of the victims of this conflict the sincere condolences of the Argentine Government and people.

The Israeli response after 27 December has been altogether excessive and disproportionate. Israel must fully respect its obligations in the framework of international humanitarian law and take all steps to protect the Palestinian civilian population. United Nations and other reports regarding the number of Palestinian civilians who have died as a result of Israeli bombing and land operations show that such steps have not been taken.

That is why my country feels that the immediate priority is to declare a ceasefire and to end violence and all military operations. The Israeli troops must withdraw from the Gaza Strip and attacks against Israeli territories much cease. The Israeli proposition to establish a ceasefire for a few hours is clearly an unacceptable response, since it cannot contribute in any way to resolving the grave and urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestinian civil population. What is needed at this hour is a permanent and unconditional end to all hostilities.

Taking into consideration that the parties alone are not capable of arriving to an agreement, the Security Council must assume its responsibilities and adopt a resolution in this regard. The Council avoids this obligation only at the risk of gravely damaging the credibility of the United Nations. My country supports the various efforts being made to establish conditions conducive to the adoption of a decision of this nature.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is alarming. Under the current conditions, international assistance cannot reach the affected population. If we do not act urgently in the short run, it may escalate to a major humanitarian crisis that could affect more than 1.5 million Palestinians.

Argentina is currently putting together a significant package of humanitarian assistance for Gaza. We are prepared to join our efforts with those of the rest of the international community. However, those efforts will be meaningless unless assistance immediately reaches the thousands of Palestinian men, women and children who are at this very moment suffering as a result of the violence. It is therefore urgent that a ceasefire be declared, so that humanitarian agencies can deploy on the ground and begin to work.

Finally, I would like to say that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on the agenda of the Security Council for more than 60 years. The current crisis illustrates to us once again the urgency of achieving a lasting peace in the region that will lead to the establishment of a democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Argentina hopes that the Security Council will this time shoulder its responsibilities and contribute to immediately ending hostilities and to establishing the conditions necessary to achieve peace, so as to benefit all the peoples living in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): For nearly two weeks now, the Israeli military onslaught against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has raged unabated. Just yesterday we witnessed a new low, with news of Israeli strikes against schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East. Innocent civilians, including women and children seeking refuge, have fallen victim. Once again, Indonesia condemns, in the strongest manner possible, Israeli military attacks against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which are in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law.

It is a measure of the gravity of the situation that the Security Council yesterday heard directly from the principals concerned. We appreciate very much the presence and statements of President Mahmoud Abbas, Foreign Ministers of Security Council members, Foreign Ministers of members of the League of Arab States and the Secretary General of the Arab League himself. Indeed, we are cognizant of, and encouraged by, the various ongoing intensive diplomatic efforts to bring the fighting to an end. Indonesia is particularly mindful of the strong efforts being made by the Secretary-General in concert with regional countries. The role of countries in the region, individually or collectively through the League of Arab States, in promoting peace in the region has been particularly pivotal.

Such intensive diplomatic efforts accentuate one glaring fact: the continued lack of a formal and unified Council position. Far from building on the common position reached in the press statement by its President on 28 December 2008, the Security Council has thus far been unable to pursue stronger measures to end all violence and military activities and to restore the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Of course, we are only too aware of the painstaking process of diplomatic negotiations and the need to formulate a finely crafted and balanced resolution. However, when the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate and innocent civilians continue to fall victim, the price of delay is immeasurable. Indonesia calls on the Council to issue without delay a crystal-clear and simple message: end the fighting. The cycle of violence must be reversed. The victims must be assisted. And the peace process must be revived. Indeed, beyond the death and destruction that the Israeli military operations have wrought, the peace process itself is also ultimately at risk. We believe that a credible and permanent ceasefire, with the requisite international mechanism, must be immediately established.

Similarly urgent is the lifting of the closures of the Gaza crossings and the provision of humanitarian access in a continuous and permanent manner. My delegation calls for unhindered access to the Gaza Strip by persons, including humanitarian workers, and essential supplies. Palestine cannot go it alone in responding to the humanitarian challenges in the Gaza Strip. Hence, the continued provision of emergency and humanitarian assistance by the international community to the Palestinian people in Gaza remains critical.

We cannot ignore the fact that Israel has not responded to the Security Council's call in its statement of 28 December 2008. A situation of such magnitude in the Middle East warrants a serious and swift response from the Council. It is therefore our fervent hope that Council will be able to assume its responsibility by taking a firm and formal decision.

We believe that, should the Council remain unable to act, alternative avenues for action within the United Nations system should, with the support of the parties directly affected, be sought, including the General Assembly, by invoking the Uniting for Peace resolution — General Assembly resolution 377 (V).

The Charter of the United Nations clearly outlines that maintaining peace and security is one of the purposes of the Organization. At this critical juncture, we are called upon to live up to that goal, to spare no effort to bring the violence in Gaza to and end and to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Amil (Pakistan): I take the floor to express our grave concern over the prevailing situation in the Gaza Strip and to reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian people. Pakistan shares their pain and suffering in these exceptionally trying circumstances.

The besieged populations of Gaza, who were originally dispossessed and driven from their own homes by the Israeli occupation, are being tormented once again by a brutal military campaign by the occupying Power. For 12 days now, the international community has witnessed in shock and horror the unimaginable human tragedy and grave humanitarian crisis that have unfolded in Gaza as a result of the callous, excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel.

The killing of any civilian on either side is unacceptable. We have called for an end to the firing of rockets on Israel. Those actions do not serve the Palestinian cause in any way. However, attempts to justify the overwhelming force and massively disproportionate response by Israel to those rockets are misplaced. Such attempts seem to try to mask the origins of the conflict, the root cause — that is, the occupation, human rights violations and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people — and the obvious frustration of an oppressed and deprived population languishing under the stranglehold and blockades of the occupying Power.

The colossal scale of death and destruction caused by this campaign of terror especially targeted against civilians and the infrastructure in Gaza has been widely reported and documented by the international media, human rights and humanitarian organizations and the United Nations. Nothing has been spared — homes, civilian facilities, places of worship, civilian shelters and even United Nations schools. Indeed, in this precision targeting and so-called smart bombing, among the hundreds martyred and the thousands injured are scores of women and children. Those actions cannot be justified under any pretext whatsoever. They are in flagrant violation of international law and of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. There should be accountability for these violations.

Together with the entire international community, the Government and the people of Pakistan have strongly condemned this aggression and the spilling of innocent blood in Gaza. We have appealed for the cessation of hostilities and violence and support all efforts to that end. We believe that the use of force not only contravenes international principles and norms; it is also counterproductive, as past experience has proved. The failure to stop the aggression will only perpetuate the cycle of violence and foment desperation, anger and extremism. We take note of the reprieve in attacks, and we sincerely hope that it becomes permanent. The resumption of attacks, with the resultant civilian casualties, however, is not acceptable.

From the broader perspective, we are seriously concerned that the deteriorating situation in Gaza as a result of the Israeli attacks could lead to an escalation of tensions in the region and undermine the efforts for promoting a peaceful, just and durable settlement of the question of Palestine, which is the key to achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The crisis in Gaza requires an urgent, collective and effective response from the international community. It cannot wait while innocent people continue to be killed. In accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council was expected to galvanize and lead such a response. Yet the Council has once again failed to act. To be truthful, it has not been allowed to act. It has failed to recognize the international condemnation of the situation in Gaza. It has been unable to capitalize on the worldwide backing for an immediate ceasefire and to support the numerous ongoing efforts by regional and international partners to secure peace. It has failed to reciprocate the sincere and constructive approach and proposals by the Arab Group, whose high-level delegation is currently with us.

Under the circumstances, the silence and the inaction of the Council are inexplicable and are a further blow to its already questioned credibility and legitimacy — a point that was repeatedly raised by many delegations in the debate yesterday. Ironically, this foot-dragging by the Council comes in the wake of its own much-touted resolution 1850 (2008), adopted recently, on 16 December 2008. While noting the shortcomings of that resolution, we had nevertheless hoped that serious and sincere efforts would be undertaken to realize the underlying commitment for peace embodied in it. We believe the Council must stand firmly behind its call on the parties to fulfil their obligations and to refrain from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of the negotiations. The Council must stop the Israeli aggression in order to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to peace and negotiations.

We support the calls for the Council to adopt, without further delay, a resolution that should compel Israel to immediately stop its aggression, demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire and its full respect by both parties, provide for a complete lifting of the siege of Gaza and opening of the border crossings, ensure unhindered and safe access and conditions for humanitarian work, establish a mechanism to ensure the protection of the civilian population and the monitoring of the ceasefire, and promote intra-Palestinian unity and reconciliation.

In that regard, we support the draft resolution submitted by Libya on behalf of the Arab Group, which is also consistent with the final communiqué of the extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) at the level of foreign ministers, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 3 January 2009.

We would also like to note that, in coordination with the Arab Group, the African Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, the OIC Group in Geneva has requested a special session of the Human Rights Council on 9 January to address the grave violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the aggression on the occupied Gaza Strip.

Together with these steps, the international community must rededicate its attention and redouble its efforts towards the larger objective of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the resolution of the Palestinian question on the basis of international law and the full implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreements, the obligations of the parties and the framework provided by the Madrid terms of reference, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We would like to conclude by reiterating Pakistan's steadfast and complete support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent, viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): Allow me first to congratulate you, Mr. President, on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council in this first month of 2009. I am certain that, thanks to your mastery of the procedures of and issues before this important body, the Council's work will be fruitful. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Ambassador Neven Jurica, the Permanent Representative of Croatia, for the excellent way in which he steered the work of the Council over the past month.

I am grateful to you, Sir, and to the other members of the Council for having given me the opportunity to take part, as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in this discussion of the serious situation in Gaza due to the brutal, deliberate and unrelenting military attack launched by Israel 12 days ago.

The Committee most vigorously condemns this military attack and the destruction perpetrated by Israel in the Gaza Strip, which have killed more than 600 Palestinians and wounded thousands of others, mostly innocent civilians. The Committee demands that Israel cease immediately and without condition its deadly military campaign against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Israel must be held responsible for the murders and wounding of innocent unarmed civilians, including women and children, which is a flagrant violation of the principles of international law. The Committee also demands that Israel immediately open the border crossings with Gaza in order to allow emergency medical assistance to be delivered along with other essential goods for the Palestinian people, who desperately need them.

The blockade, which has strangled the Gaza Strip over the past year, has already sparked humanitarian disaster. The Committee underscores that the Fourth Geneva Convention requires occupying Powers to protect the civilians who are living under their occupation, in particular by providing them with essential services such as food and medicine.

The Committee has always opposed and has continually condemned the rocket attacks launched by Palestinian groups into Israeli territory. The Committee once again calls for an immediate end to these rocket attacks, which give Israel a pretext for its military attacks against the Gaza Strip, although it is totally unacceptable that the population of the Gaza Strip in its entirety be collectively punished for attacks perpetrated by groups or individuals.

The Committee reminds the Israeli Government that the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention many times affirmed that the Convention applied to the occupied Palestinian territories. That was then reiterated by the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Gaza Strip continues to be an occupied territory by the very fact that Israel controls the daily life of the Palestinian population, down to the smallest details. The international community needs to take immediate

action to put an end to what is a flagrant violation of this important international instrument. Specifically, the Committee urges the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to immediately take decisive measures in order to meet their commitments taken under article 1, that is, to comply with and ensure compliance with the Convention under all circumstances.

The Committee believes that the entire international community is responsible for ending the carnage. Given the gravity of the situation, the Committee believes that the Security Council must shoulder its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter and do its utmost to end the crisis by immediately taking specific and effective measures to protect the civilian population. To that end, the Committee believes that the Council must cooperate closely with the parties and all actors involved, in particular the Quartet and the regional partners. Such an effort would help to prevent further victims and to calm the situation on the ground. An immediate and permanent ceasefire should be followed up forthwith by measures aimed at finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the framework of the ongoing negotiations and at establishing a viable Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to begin by thanking you, Sir, for having convened this meeting at this difficult juncture and by wishing you success in your presidency of the Security Council this month.

As many speakers have mentioned yesterday and today, despite the enormous anger and worldwide anguish shown by the international community, the abhorrent carnage and the crimes against humanity committed by the Zionist regime against the innocent Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip are continuing unabated, and every day we witness a new face of this vicious aggression and crime. As a result of this atrocity, hundreds of civilians have been cold-bloodedly massacred in Gaza and thousands wounded, most of them women and children.

The world community is witnessing with outrage and anguish the perpetration of some of the most blatant examples of crimes against humanity and genocide committed by an irresponsible and brutal regime that knows no boundaries in violating the most basic principles of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. It would seem as if the life of that criminal regime depends on creating and perpetuating bloodshed, and as if it feeds on nothing but war crimes, aggression, occupation and State terrorism.

The people of Gaza continue to be subjected to untold sufferings that are unprecedented in the recent history of humankind. It is appalling that, in the twenty-first century, the civilized world should witness an entire population under crippling blockade, starved, deprived of the most basic supplies, including bread and drinking water, and slaughtered in the most horrendous ways, having been left with nowhere to go, nothing to eat and no safe place to take shelter. Even the places that the United Nations has provided for this innocent people to escape Israeli brutalities are savagely attacked, as the world saw in yesterday's Israeli attack on schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, killing more than 40 people, many of them children.

The Israeli regime is targeting every human being, every house and every infrastructure in Gaza. It is actually targeting every value that the civilized world stands for and every principle of international law that is dear to the world community. Mosques, hospitals, schools, United Nations buildings, medicine and food stores, and even the farms and private houses of the people are callously bombarded and women, men and children slaughtered in their beds, in their homes and everywhere on the streets. To cover up all these crimes, the media is not allowed access to the area by the Israeli regime to cover the tragic developments in the Gaza Strip.

This savagery should be stopped and it should be stopped immediately. The Israeli war machine must be stopped from shattering more lives and livelihoods, and the Israeli war criminals should be brought to justice for the crimes they have perpetrated, and continue to perpetrate, and for the outrageous and brutal pain and torment they have inflicted and continue to inflict on the innocent people in Gaza.

As mentioned by some speakers yesterday, a whole population is being massacred only because it resists occupation and State terrorism and simply

because it has exercised its right to vote, which is the most basic principle of democracy.

The credibility of the international community and of the United Nations is at stake and has been challenged once again by the Israeli regime's war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is long overdue for the Security Council to live up to its responsibilities to stop these atrocities. The Security Council must take urgent and effective measures to stop this carnage and to help ease the sufferings of the people in the Gaza Strip. Every minute matters, since each entails more crimes by the Israelis and more losses for the innocent Palestinians. The Council must act and it must act now.

The Security Council should adopt a binding resolution calling for an immediate end to the Israeli attacks and aggression against the innocent Palestinian people in Gaza; immediate Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the lifting of the blockade; the opening of the crossings and the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to the people there. The international community must hold that regime accountable for its crimes and for the damages it has inflicted on the defenceless Palestinians, and should mobilize its efforts and resources to reconstruct the infrastructure in Gaza.

The stalling tactics of some permanent members to obstruct any action by the Security Council and to render the Council incapacitated are neither acceptable nor justifiable, and are tantamount to complicity in the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people. The Security Council must be allowed to take action and to stop this unbridled State terrorism. Indeed, if the Security Council continues to fail to discharge its responsibility to stop the carnage, the Member States are fully ready to ask the General Assembly to take up the issue on the basis of its resolution 377 (V) — the "Uniting for Peace" resolution.

I do not wish to take the valuable time of the Council to address the absurd statement made by the Israeli representative in the Council yesterday, in which certain baseless allegations were raised against my country. Suffice it to stress that these are despicable tactics that seek to distract attention from Israeli crimes at a time when the whole world is united to counter those crimes. These unworthy tactics have not worked in the past and will not work in the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is with deep sadness and grief that the people of Nicaragua have learned the news of the tragedy being experienced once again by our brothers, the Palestinian people.

Six hundred and sixty people have been killed and more than 3,000 injured as a result of the latest Israeli aggression against the occupied Palestinian territories. For more than 12 days now, the heroic Palestinian people have been the victims of bombardments by air, sea and land that constitute a massacre of the Palestinian civilian population.

Yet again, history is repeating itself; regrettably, that appears to be happening with respect to the question of Palestine, whose population is suffering under persecution and systematic genocide. The wall that separates that population from its neighbours isolates them, forces them to live in misery and denies them the right to a homeland of their own. Regrettably, it is the descendants of those who had been declared stateless, who were the victims of Nazi persecution and genocide and who were forced to live in ghettoes who are now victimizing the Palestinian people.

But while the Jewish Holocaust ended with the end of the Second World War and while the Jewish people were given a State and territory, the Government of Israel's excessive campaign of destruction has continued for more than 60 years. This has denied the Palestinian people — the age-old inhabitants of historic Palestine — the right to an independent homeland. Thus far, the two-State solution remains a solution on paper only.

The situation in Gaza is tragic. The attacks that took place yesterday — the day of the Three Kings, a very important day for children — on three schools protected by the United Nations flag, claiming more than 43 lives and injuring more than 100 people, was a further Israeli scorn for human rights, for the right to life, for international law, for the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and for the United Nations. It is a clear example of the tragedy that the people of Palestine are enduring.

Many humanitarian organizations have condemned the humanitarian crisis throughout the 362 square kilometres of the Palestinian territory of Gaza, whose 1.5 million inhabitants have been living in misery owing to the blockade imposed by Israel. The

Israeli military attacks have caused additional shortages of basic food, medical supplies, drinking water and fuel, as well as electricity cuts, because assistance cannot be delivered.

This is a horrible tragedy. People continue to arrive at hospitals; the number of injured continues to rise. The director of Gaza operations for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, John Ging, has called the situation incredible.

For its part, my Government regrets the fact that the Security Council has not yet been able to reach any outcome while we see the number of victims of the barbaric Israeli attacks continue to rise. In that connection, we support the statement issued by the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, which expresses deep disappointment at the inability of the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security, and notes that, despite more than 12 days of sustained military attacks that have gravely affected the civilian population and heightened instability and tensions in the region, the Council has regrettably been unable to take any concrete measure to end the aggression.

The Security Council has the legal and moral obligation to take all measures necessary to bring an immediate end to the aggression against the Palestinian people. Nicaragua rejects that aggression and condemns in the strongest terms the extermination practiced by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territories. The current hostilities are further destabilizing the situation in the occupied territories and throughout the Middle East and are making it ever more difficult to achieve a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem.

The Security Council must compel Israel to put an immediate end to its military operations and to open all border crossings in order to guarantee unhindered access to the area for humanitarian assistance.

Any decision to be adopted must not only lead to a lasting solution, but must also guarantee that hostilities will not resume. Any decision must respect all relevant international resolutions. There can be no military solution to the Palestinian problem. We support a peaceful negotiated resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the right of the Palestinian people to sovereignty and self-determination in an independent Palestinian State, on the basis of the 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as its capital. Only in that way cam we have lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call now on the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Escalona Ojeda (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving all countries the opportunity to address the Security Council in this open debate.

On behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I wish to express our firmest condemnation of the genocide that the State of Israel is carrying out in Gaza and to affirm our unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian people. We are witnessing one of the darkest facets of modern war: the punishment of a civilian population in order to demolish its morale, destroy its spirit of resistance, to crush all will to struggle and to make people believe that benign slavery is preferable to resistance in the quest for freedom. In that context, the destruction of Hamas — which, of course, is among the objectives here — would be a collateral effect.

The State of Israel continues to sow the wind, and it will reap the whirlwind. No tyrant has ever been able to drain a people's last drop of blood: before that happens, peoples have risen up and have triumphed. That is what took place with the resistance against Nazi fascism during the Second World War — which, it appears, has been forgotten.

Every cluster bomb of depleted uranium or white phosphorus — whose use is a war crime — sows not only death, but also a hatred that will become part of people's genetic code, generation after generation. Israel is creating millions of suicidal human beings, who will proliferate throughout the world. Then, neither Israelis nor anyone else will have peace. That is not the path we are seeking. The Israelis lost the war in Lebanon in 2006; they are not invincible. A Nuremberg tribunal will be awaiting them in the future in order to judge them as war criminals.

With the permission of the Council, I shall read out a communiqué issued yesterday afternoon by the Government of Venezuela:

> "The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, along with the peoples of the world, is once again witnessing the horror of

the death of innocent children and women resulting from the invasion of the Gaza Strip by Israeli troops, and the merciless bombing by air and land systematically carried out by the State of Israel on Palestinian territory.

"In this tragic hour of outrage, the people of Venezuela express their unreserved solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people, share in the grief of thousands of families at the loss of their loved ones and extends their hand to them, affirming that the Government of Venezuela will work tirelessly to see those responsible for these atrocious crimes severely punished.

"The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela categorically condemns the flagrant violations of international law carried out by the State of Israel and denounces its planned use of State terrorism, by which that country has placed itself at the margins of the community of nations.

"For these reasons, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has decided to expel the Ambassador of Israel and some of the personnel of the Embassy of Israel in Venezuela, reaffirming its vocation for peace and its demand that international law be respected. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has instructed its Mission to the United Nations, along with the majority of Governments calling for the same thing, to pressure the Security Council to apply urgent and necessary measures to stop the invasion by the State of Israel against Palestinian territory.

"President Hugo Chavez, who has met with senior representatives of the World Jewish Congress and has always been opposed to anti-Semitism and to any type of discrimination and racism, has made a fraternal appeal to the Jewish people around the world to oppose these criminal policies of the State of Israel, which recall the worst chapters of the twentieth century. With the genocide of the Palestinian people, the State of Israel can never offer its people the prospect of a necessary and lasting peace."

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Hreggvidsson (Iceland): The situation in Gaza is unacceptable. In the three weeks since the end of the six-month ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, hundreds of civilians, including many women and children, have died in military actions and thousands have been injured.

My country has condemned the killings of civilians and aligns itself with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with those Member States that have called upon Israel to immediately stop its military actions in that densely populated area. Iceland has also condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza to terrorize Israeli civilians. Hamas bears a heavy responsibility for drawing civilians into the conflict zone. However, Israel's actions in Gaza in the past two weeks are both disproportionate and clearly contrary to international humanitarian law.

The immediate imperative is the suspension of all violence by all parties. It will then be essential for Israel to lift its blockade on Gaza so that humanitarian aid can immediately be given access to Gaza.

The peace process must recommence with the active involvement of the international community. Iceland renews its call for the better inclusion of women in the peace process, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). In that regard, as it did in December, Iceland calls the attention of the Council to the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC) — a tripartite body involving Israelis, Palestinians and prominent international women leaders. The solidarity among these women across the lines of conflict can offer inspiration and hope for their societies as a whole.

The Security Council is the international body responsible for maintaining international peace and security. The situation in Gaza demands a concerted effort by the Council to bring an end to the bloodshed and put forward a plan on how to further the goal of ending the occupation and achieving a two-State solution, which is a prerequisite for durable peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to contribute briefly to this very important debate. Australia has been deeply disturbed by the continuing violence in Gaza and southern Israel.

The escalation of the conflict underlines the urgency of diplomatic efforts to find a resolution. Australia supports the actions of the United Nations in seeking to bring about an immediate ceasefire.

Australia continues to believe that a resolution to the current situation must bring a halt to rocket attacks against Israel by Hamas, an end to arms shipments into the Gaza Strip and the opening of the border crossings into the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, any diplomatic solution must form part of a longer-term compact involving Israel and Palestine, based on a two-State solution to the Israel-Palestinian issue. Australia welcomes the active role of Egypt and France in working towards a diplomatic resolution to the conflict.

Australia is gravely concerned by the humanitarian implications of this conflict and notes that its expansion also exacerbated what was already a grave situation in the Gaza Strip. It is critical that Israel meet its obligations under international humanitarian law to the people of the Gaza Strip, ensuring that they have access to basic goods, food, medical supplies and humanitarian assistance. Australia welcomes Israel's announcement that it is establishing improved conditions for aid to flow into the Gaza Strip.

Australia has been a long-time provider of assistance to the Palestinian people, doubling its assistance in 2008 to $45 million. On 1 January of this year Australia announced an immediate commitment of $5 million in additional assistance to the people of the Gaza Strip. This assistance will go towards providing emergency food and medical supplies, as well as cash assistance to conflict-affected families. Australia stands ready to provide further assistance as required.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ecuador advocates a peaceful solution to international conflicts and disputes and emphatically rejects the threat or use of force as a mechanism to resolve them. Unfortunately, in recent days my country, like the entire international community, has seen the occupying Power resorting once again to violence instead of dialogue and subjecting the civilian population to death and despair. Ecuador considers the military offensive carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza unacceptable and disproportionate.

On behalf of the President of the Republic, Rafael Correa Delgado, I would like to express the deep condolences of the Government and people of Ecuador at the deaths of hundreds of civilians, especially children, who have been victims of the military activities.

We associate ourselves with the many statements by different Governments, and with the calls for an immediate ceasefire as an initial measure that would make it possible to reach a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict. It is imperative that the international community, through this Organization and its Security Council, adopt the measures set out in the United Nations Charter with a view to guaranteeing full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in the conflict area.

In that respect, my Government believes it is urgent to open all the recognized border crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip so that the Palestinian population can have access to humanitarian assistance, including food and medicine, in order to prevent a worsening of the current emergency humanitarian situation, extreme vulnerability and famine. Ecuador would like to particularly express its support and gratitude to the United Nations agencies and to all governmental and non-governmental organizations that continue to provide assistance to the civilian population and asks them to remain vigilant until peace is re-established in that area.

Ecuador believes that any comprehensive solution that would make it possible to establish a lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be a military one. It must be political and be carried out in full compliance with Security Council resolutions, but above all with the ongoing commitment to the recognition of and respect for international law and with a constructive dialogue that would promote the future development of its peoples.

In that respect, my country reiterates its call to the members of the Security Council to adopt all measures necessary for an immediate cessation of hostilities, a solution to the humanitarian crisis and, in particular, a lasting solution and a durable peace in the region. For Ecuador, a durable peace naturally includes the right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and to have a contiguous territory and an independent State.

Once again, we call on the Security Council to act steadfastly and decisively. International public opinion is awaiting a strong response from the United Nations. A failure to respond would call into question the legitimacy and effectiveness of this organ of the United Nations system.

However, we also believe that the responsibility of the Security Council does not exclude action by the other organs of the United Nations, such as the General Assembly, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.

Along those lines, Ecuador would also like to support the initiative to convene a special meeting of the Human Rights Council to identify human rights violations made during the recent attacks.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bolivia.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is keeping the whole international community in a state of disquiet owing to the disproportionate military action being carried out by Israel. The Government and the people of Bolivia condemn and categorically express their rejection of that aggression, which is claiming innocent human lives, particularly children's, from whom the most sacred of human rights, the right to life, is being snatched. The current situation in the Gaza Strip is one of pain, bitterness and despair.

Israel's actions once again clearly show its flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, international law, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the human rights conventions. Added to that is the serious impact on humanitarian issues, which hour by hour are making it more difficult to meet even the basic needs of the Palestinian people. Is it possible to view this acute humanitarian crisis with indifference?

The credibility of the Security Council is once again being called into question by international public opinion. Therefore, within the framework of its jurisdiction, the Council must provide a strong response with the adoption of a binding resolution that would reopen the way for peace and put an immediate end to all acts of violence, which are only aggravating the crisis. There must be no further loss of human life owing to the occupying Power's occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories, which is at the very root of the crisis.

It is important to renew the peace process with a constructive and creative dialogue for the benefit of the region. In that regard, no efforts or initiatives should be spared to that end within the framework of the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and with a view to the recognition of an independent Palestinian State. Military action is not the way to build a lasting peaceful solution.

The Government and the people of Bolivia fervently appeal for the border crossings to be reopened, to enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to the Palestinian people, who have our full solidarity. Finally, I should like to state that Bolivia fully supports the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Buffa (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to make this statement on behalf of the States members of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and associated States — Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela and my country, Paraguay.

The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States express their gratitude to the Security Council for the timely and necessary convening of this open debate to hear the viewpoints and appeals of Member States on the regrettable situation in the Gaza Strip. Similarly, as they publicly stated at the beginning of this conflict, they would like to reiterate before this body their deep concern at the current tragic situation in the Gaza Strip, whose high toll in loss of civilian life and casualties is regrettable.

The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States condemn Israel's land incursion into the Gaza Strip and that country's disproportionate use of force. Similarly, they reiterate their condemnation of the launching of rockets by Palestinian groups against Israeli territory.

In that context, the States members of MERCOSUR and associated States also vehemently condemn the Israeli attacks against schools operated by the United Nations in the Gaza Strip, as a result of which over 40 innocent civilians have died. The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States extend their most heartfelt condolences to all family members of the victims of that conflict.

Amid this regrettable situation, we join the whole international community in calling for an immediate cessation of all hostilities. We urge both parties to resume the dialogue interrupted by the violence, so as to achieve the complete restoration of peace in the region, which does not deserve to live constantly punished by violence.

The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States want that dialogue to contribute to achieving a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict, with strict adherence to international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Security Council is the United Nations organ with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. For that reason, we urge the Council, which acts through the mandate of Member States, not to remain indifferent to its responsibility and to adopt urgent and categorical measures to remedy this appalling situation.

Similarly, we request the international community and the parties to the conflict to guarantee, for humanitarian reasons, the permanent reopening of border crossings with Gaza to ensure the provision of food, supplies and medicines, facilitating the evacuation of the wounded and free access for humanitarian assistance, in coordination with the United Nations, to help alleviate the precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Lastly, we appeal for a continued belief in the peace. We support all constructive efforts aimed at bringing an immediate end to the violence and call for the resumption of peace negotiations between the parties involved as soon as possible, so as to establish an independent Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, which would create the necessary stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.